

Crystal Ball works with the news media in BPA's communication group. She answers calls from reporters, works on press releases and helps plan education events for the media. She gets into the field whenever she can and often covers stories from there.

In some of her "spare time" at work, Ball likes to use what she learns to help educate others. So each fall usually finds her helping at one of the salmon events in the Northwest. For the past four years she has volunteered as a guide for Salmon Watch. Oregon Trout sponsors the field education program that BPA funds.

The Circuit asked Ball to write a first-person account of her experience. She filed this article from her mid-October outing.

Today, the suit and stockings stay in the closet and out come the blue jeans and hiking boots. I'm spending the day with high school students instead of fellow office workers.

Photo by an Oregon Trout member



"How does the Bonneville Power Administration feel about salmon recovery," the science teacher asks after I introduce myself to the students from Tualatin High School.



Photo by Crystal Ball

Salmon Watch – (Above) Tualatin High School students view a spawned salmon in the Sandy River. The Salmon Watch outing took place during the Oxbow Salmon Festival near Gresham, Ore.. (Left) Crystal Ball of BPA communications led the high school class on a Salmon Watch field trip.

Salmon Watch is a stream thing

It's a beautiful October day without rain clouds clogging the bright blue sky. A cool breeze blows off the Sandy River inside Metro's Oxbow Park and I ponder the question. I could recite the impressive figures we use in communication to relate how much BPA spends on salmon recovery each year or I could try to explain complicated hydropower operations. Instead, I say, "We don't want to lose them."

Of the millions of dollars BPA spends each year on salmon recovery, a very small portion goes to funding an impressive program called Salmon Watch. It's a collaborative, environmental education program for middle and high school students in Oregon.

About four volunteers from various organizations and interest groups participate in each school field trip. At my station, the students and I evaluate water quality. Since we've just watched a number of fall Chinook salmon spawning upriver, we assume this is a river of high quality, but we conduct a dissolved oxygen experiment to learn more.

The experiment is a hit as the water changes colors with each

addition of chemicals, and then changes back to clear with about 10 drops of sodium thiosulfate. Each drop is equal to 1 part per million (ppm) of dissolved oxygen. I tell the students salmon thrive in rivers with about 6 to 10 ppm. Our example yields about 9 ppm.

But the students want to know more about salmon. For example, one student who wears a cap embroidered with the name of an ocean charter boat asks me how many fish die when they go through the turbines – like going through a blender.

I'm not surprised by the comparison since it's often reported in newspapers this way. I talk to him about fish screens and improvements in power generating equipment and tell him baby salmon aren't made into milk shakes. We laugh, but now he's more informed.

The thing is, I've learned I don't need a degree in biology or chemistry to help kids learn about the natural environment. Oregon Trout makes the step-by-step directions for each experiment available. But they need the volunteers to teach the next generation of decision-makers about the importance of wild fish conservation and watershed management.

Knowing I'm responsible for the success of a Salmon Watch trip is what makes me search for chemicals such as sodium thiosulfate and those funny looking polarized glasses each year. ◀

BPA splashes for salmon

From Boise to Gresham to Kettle Falls to Walla Walla, BPA again made splashes this fall. The splashes were Kids in the Creek outdoor classrooms. BPA folks and others led school groups into the water to check the health of streams for fish.

Rob Swedo, government coordinator at Spokane, said BPA's Kids in the Creek program was again the most sought-after activity at salmon and water festivals around the region.

Mechanical engineer Tom Osborn was one of several BPA folks who volunteered to work at events last month. He said some employees don't realize how valuable these programs are to BPA.

"One of my goals is to let kids know that it's fun to be a scientist, biologist, engineer or other employee at BPA," Osborn said. "And if they work hard in school, they too can get a job that is fun and that makes a difference."

Osborn said, "BPA's program is memorable for kids and their parents. At Boise we even had parents join the Kids in the Creek. And some of the school kids brought their parents back later in the day."

Osborn said, "These types of programs are important for BPA and our future. They make an imprint on kid's lives. After all, what do we remember most from our school years?"

"When I look back," he said, "the things that really stick out in my mind are the field trips to

the dam and fish hatchery. The field trips are what I really remember most ... not the classroom time."

"Sure we have important things to do to run our business," Osborn said, "but we need to help educate people too. If we don't partner to educate our children, who will?" he asked. ◀



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Kids in the Creek lineup – (1 & 2) Biologist Andy Thoms leads a line of school children into the creek at Wenatchee while engineer Henry Macias lines up boots for another class.

Photos by Craig Newcomb

Wenatchee waders – (3 & 4) Sickler substation engineers Fred Bryant and Martin O'Rourke lead field classes in the stream.

Photos by Craig Newcomb

Rocks and bug hunt – (5) Val Shelton of the Spokane office leads a class on a stream bug hunt at the Lake Roosevelt water festival.

Photo by Jessi Phelps

Walla Walla watchers – (6) School teacher Carmen Parker (standing) and parent Penny Royse led a class at Walla Walla.

Photo by Tom Osborn

A real fish fan – (7) BPA's Tom Osborn from Richland, Wash., wore a fish hat and answered questions for young students during this fall's Salmon and Steelhead Days at Boise, Idaho.

(Photo by Larry King)

Volunteers – (8) Pat Zimmer of regional relations (center) and Dave Thomas of communications (right) staff BPA's booth at the Oxbow Salmon Festival on the Sandy River near Portland. Employees around the region volunteer at salmon and water festivals each fall.

Photo by Paul Hansen